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Practitioners of Medicine as Students of Science.

BY

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NASHVILLE, TENN.

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PRACTITIONERS OF MEDICINE AS STUDENTS OF SCIENCE.

BY J. BERRIEN LINDSLEY, M.D., NASHVILLE, TENN.

EARLY in January last, walking down the Capitoline hill, I was accosted by a leading member of the General Assembly with the earnest interpellation: "Doctor, for the public welware, I do hope that you will succeed in getting a law passed for protecting our people against incompetent physicians." Said I, "that is more your business than mine; of all professions, the medical is least interested in such a law, inasmuch as quacks send us more patients than any other one cause of disease." "O!" says he, "I am not referring to quacks, but to practicing physicians who are not worth a button. I am a lawyer, and am compelled all the time to study hard, so as to honestly earn my fees. But here is Dr. —— and Dr. —— of my town, leading physicians, I don't see them studying at all; their spare time is spent in *fooling* about, talking politics, and so on. They don't keep up with the times." And so he went on with a characteristic tirade against lazy doctors, and the necessity of a law regulating the practice of medicine, so as to compel them to study. There was great force in his remarks. The public expect physicians to be learned men, and especially well informed in science.

Certainly every practitioner of medicine should be an educated gentleman, and in the proper sense of the term a *scientist*. Physician means student of nature. History shows that the physical and natural sciences owe their origin and early development to the disciples of Æsculapius. These sciences have long since attained independent fields, and now in turn are repaying medicine a thousand fold. Within a score or two of years biology, chemistry, and physics have commenced a progress in medical theory and practice which bids fair by the end of this century to become a revolution. Every graduate who worthily earns his diploma has become something more than an amatuer in several great branches of science. He has acquired scientific methods and ideas. What I would here urge is, that on commencing practice he should not only keep up his elementary knowledge, but

should take up some one study, with the view of becoming proficient and an authority. By so doing he will keep his mental faculties acute and bright. He will also avoid falling into the gross error of looking upon knowledge as merely a means for getting money, and will maintain the enlarged and liberal spirit of the seeker after truth. Consequently he will command the respect of every intelligent person who may have occasion to estimate his abilities.

Much has been written and spoken for thirty years past about elevating the character of the profession. Great outcry has been made about the deficiencies of medical schools, and the imagined degradation of the degree. Most of this declamation is the result of ignorances and prejudices. Medical education has made magnificent strides during this period. The trouble is with the doctor *after* and not *before* receiving the degree. Many remain students; many do not. These are the dead weights which prevent the profession from exercising the great influences upon communities which it ought to do, as pre-eminently the populous and wealthy body of scientists in America. A prejudice is here to be met. It is often said that too much science interferes with success in daily practice. This is mere nonsense and an excuse for laziness. Pages could be filled with the names of great surgeons, obstetricians and physicians, who have not only adorned their own profession by scientific studies, but have earned name and fame in the outside world by such studies.

Dr. Humphrey Storer, of Boston, is a shining example. His able report upon the fishes of Massachusetts made him none the less the favorite obstetrician. Did time allow honored names in all the States adjoining Tennessee could be added?

As showing what a physician, toiling year in and year out at his profession, may yet contribute to a single branch of science, steadily worked at as a labor of love, I wish to get the pointed attention of the State Society to the recent publication by Dr. August Gattinger, of Nashville, entitled, "The Tennessee Flora, with special reference to the Flora of Nashville." The first, and only contribution of importance to the botanical history of Tennessee, is the fruit of some thirty-eight years patient and systematic work, by an educated physician, who all that time has been a laborious practitioner, and maintaining a family by his profession.

Not only has Dr. Gattinger collected and arranged a splendid herbarium at his own expense, but he has actually published this neat volume, octavo, 109 pages, by his own means. He has done for the bot-

any of Tennessee what the eminent Gerard Troost, State geologist, did for our mineral resources, opened the way for all future workers.

Our rich universities and our well endowed agricultural bureau should at once take Dr. Gattinger from the drudgery of professional toil, and enable him to use the expert knowledge and skill possessed by him alone, in the preparation of a popular report upon the timbers, grasses and vegetable productions of the State in general, with special reference to industrial uses.

The climate of Tennessee gives it uncommon wealth from the vegetable kingdom. This wealth should be made known to our own people and to the world abroad.

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* The "Tennessee Flora," with special reference to the Flora of Nashville, Phænogams and Vascular Cryptogams, by Dr. August Gattinger, member of American Association for Advancement of Science. Published by the author. Nashville, Tennessee, 1887.

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